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AUTHOR Morgan, Carl R.; Demchak, MaryAnn
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ABSTRACT

As inclusion increasingly becomes the accepted model for meeting the needs of students with disabilities, administrator involvement becomes critical because the attitudes of school personnel and students toward inclusion frequently mirror those of the administrator. In rural areas, the building administrator is often isolated from other school district administrators and must make decisions based on available information. This paper provides guidelines to assist teachers and parents in furnishing the information that principals need to support successful changes toward inclusion. The administrator must be informed of, and actively involved in, the planning and implementation of the following areas: (1) number of students to be included; (2) impact on students with and without disabilities; (3) specific needs of students with disabilities; (4) strategies and supports needed for successful inclusion; (5) roles of general and special education teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals; (6) training needs of all school staff; (7) parent/caregiver involvement; (8) potential costs and funding sources; and (9) potential resource personnel to assist with training and implementation. The key to success of any inclusionary program is open and honest communication between all parties involved. The building administrator can help guarantee success, but can also, perhaps unwittingly, be a hindrance to the process. If the building administrator is involved and informed from the beginning, the change to inclusive educational programs has a much higher chance of success. (TD)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Carl R. Morgan
Educational Leadership Dept.

MaryAnn Demchak
Curriculum & Instruction Dept.
University of Nevada, Reno
Reno, NV 89557

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ADDRESSING ADMINISTRATIVE NEEDS FOR SUCCESSFUL INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

As inclusion increasingly becomes the accepted model for meeting the needs of students with disabilities, administrator involvement becomes more critical. Administrator involvement is essential to the success of any programmatic change. However, it is particularly important to the effectiveness of inclusive programs in that the attitudes of school personnel and the students toward inclusion of students with disabilities will frequently mirror those of the administrator (Rude & Anderson, 1992). According to Evans, Bird, Ford, Green, & Bischoff (1992), the majority of successful efforts to move to inclusive education programs for students with disabilities are frequently the result of the cooperation and collaboration displayed by the building administrator.

In rural areas, the building administrator is frequently isolated from other building level administrators as well as from central office administrators (e.g., superintendent, curriculum coordinators) of the school district. This isolation makes it necessary for the building administrator to make program decisions based on the available information. Therefore, it is important that the administrator have accurate and up-to-date information in a timely fashion. The administrator also requires this information to present to school board members and other community members (e.g., parents) who may not be informed regarding educational issues. In small remote towns or villages the building administrator is a very visible person and is likely to be asked difficult questions when significant changes to approaches occur at the school. For example, even though local school boards do not typically initiate major educational reforms or initiatives, the board or individual members can sabotage (sometimes inadvertently) or stop efforts toward beneficial changes if they are uninformed (Roach, Ascroft, Stamp, & Kysilko, 1995). School boards typically rely on others to provide them with information (Roach et al., 1995); therefore, it can be vital for the building administrator to anticipate questions and attempt to answer them before school board members raise concerns. It is essential that the administrator has adequate information to answer questions (without violating student confidentiality). If an administrator is not fully informed and does not keep the board informed, he/she can be in a vulnerable position (Roach et al., 1995).

For an administrator who may have concerns regarding changes in approaches to service delivery (e.g., moving from a pull-out or segregated model to an inclusive model), it is not appropriate for him or her to be provided the first information at an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting in which the administrator is participating. Special and general education teachers as well as parents of children with disabilities frequently ask how to provide this information to administrators as well as how to convince their building administrators that a change to inclusive programs is beneficial. The purpose of this paper is to provide guidelines for strategies to assist teachers and parents in furnishing information needed by building administrators to provide the support necessary for successful changes in service delivery. Although teachers and parents will want to share information with the administrator on the following topics, it is insufficient

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simply to impart knowledge. The administrator must also be actively involved in the planning and implementation of these areas:

1. Numbers of students to be included;
2. Impact on students with and without disabilities;
3. Specific needs of the students with disabilities;
4. Strategies and supports needed for successful inclusion:
5. Roles of the general and special education teachers, administrator, and paraprofessionals;
6. Training needs of all school staff;
7. Parental involvement;
8. Potential costs and potential funding sources; and
9. Potential resource personnel to assist with training and implementation.

We will provide information on each of the above points. Utilizing these topics, teachers and parents will be able to provide the building administrator with the information necessary for gaining administrative assistance for successful implementation of inclusionary programs.

Number of Students

The number of students to be included in general education classes is determined through the IEP process on an individual basis. Each IEP meeting requires a "local education agency representative;" this individual is frequently the building administrator. Thus, from the onset of a placement decision, the administrator will be involved in the process. The number of students is a critical component in the successful program due to factors such as teacher to student ratios and numbers of classrooms. In a large school with multiple classrooms per grade, it is easier to move students into general education classrooms without overloading one teacher with all of the students classified as needing special education services. It can be more difficult to evenly divide students with disabilities between classrooms without overloading one teacher in smaller schools having only one or two classes per grade level. Administrators will need to address how natural proportions of students with disabilities to those without will be maintained.

Impact on Students with and without Disabilities

It is essential to examine the impact of inclusion on all students prior to implementation of inclusive programs. It may be desirable for teacher(s) to share with administrators empirically validated benefits of inclusion for all students. For example, students without disabilities (a) acquire greater appreciation for diversity, (b) show increased tolerance of differences, (c) form social relationships and friendships with peers with disabilities,(d) have opportunities to master activities by practicing and teaching others as well as benefiting in numerous other ways (Halvorsen & Sailor, 1990). Students with disabilities (a) benefit from peer role models, (b) may display decreased rates of inappropriate behavior, (c) achieve increased numbers of IEP objectives, (d) show enhanced skill acquisition and generalization, (e) form social relationships and friendships with peers without disabilities as well as receive other benefits (Halvorsen & Sailor, 1990). Awareness of positive benefits will likely help the administrator to be more secure in the proposed changes as well as more comfortable in sharing information with other parties (e.g., parents, teachers, other administrators). The information provided must demonstrate that no adverse side effects will result by moving students with disabilities from the isolation of a segregated program to an inclusive classroom.

Specific Needs of Students with Disabilities

Although necessary first steps involve numbers of students and impact on all students, it is insufficient simply to focus only on these variables. It is essential to examine and plan strategies to meet the students' needs as defined by the IEP goals and objectives. In addition to addressing IEP goals and objectives, it is important to examine related medical, physical and behavioral needs. How will the student with a severe, and potentially life-threatening medical problem, be handled? Is the teacher trained for emergency response? These are some of the questions that need to be answered prior to placement. It might be important to involve the parents/caregivers or members of the medical community in planning for the inclusion of students with medical needs.

If a student with an emotional or behavioral disorder is to be included in a general education classroom, a behavioral plan will need to be in place, specifying appropriate responses for potential misbehaviors. What forms of discipline are appropriate? Is a system of rewards and consequences to be used? Has this system been used before with the targeted student and what was the success rate of the system? Are the parents in agreement with the proposed behavioral plan? It will be critical to the successful inclusion of a student with an emotional/behavioral disability to have these questions answered at the start of the inclusive educational program. Having this plan in place will help the administrator to breathe easier and to sleep better at night.

The obvious, and perhaps overlooked, link in the program is the IEP. It is important to have placement changes specified in the IEP process. A key method of incorporating IEP objectives into the general education classroom schedule involves completing an instructional matrix. The steps for developing such a matrix are: (1) List the activities in the daily general education classroom schedule and the approximate amount time devoted to each activity; (2) List the student's IEP objectives; (3) Use a grid showing the classroom schedule on one axis and the student's IEP objectives on the other axis; (4) On the grid place an "X" for each activity in which one of the student's IEP objectives can be addressed. Each objective will likely be addressed in multiple activities. Many activities can target more than one objective; and (5) Identify potential supports or adaptation that may be needed for meaningful participation in classroom activities. Use of such a matrix is a simple, graphic means of sharing information with administrators and others (e.g., parents) showing how IEP objectives are meaningfully targeted in inclusive settings. An appropriately written IEP will safeguard the welfare of the student as well as protect the teachers and administrators involved from issues of malpractice or liability, a frequent concern of administrators.

Strategies and Supports Needed for Successful Inclusion

The matrix discussed above aids the educational team in determining strategies and supports needed for a particular student to be included successfully. The team can use the matrix to identify specific activities or classes that require curriculum modifications, adapted materials, as well as times where additional personnel or support may be needed. Such adaptations might include adjustments in assignments for some students, simplified questioning techniques, or peer assistance strategies. It may also be necessary for the teacher to modify instructional methods to include more concrete examples and more demonstrations within the actual teaching. At any grade level, peers may aid in meeting instructional and general support needs of students with disabilities. Some schools may have a group of parent volunteers who can assist in oversight of students, under the supervision of

the teacher. Using natural supports such as these may assist an administrator in being more open to proposed changes if the teachers have suggestions regarding low cost supports.

A classroom or building may need modifications to provide accessibility for a wheelchair or other pieces of adaptive equipment. A student with physical disabilities may require special equipment such as standers, bolster chairs, or adjustable furniture to accommodate equipment. A student may need an augmentative/alternative communication device to facilitate interactions with the teacher and peers. Again, the IEP is the driving force in determining the adapted or specialized equipment that may be needed. It is critical for the administrator to see that the students in inclusive programs have the supports available in the general education classroom that may have been previously limited to the special education classroom.

In addition to student-supported strategies and supports, it is also necessary for the administrator to be aware of and involved in school-wide strategies and supports that will facilitate the effectiveness of inclusive education. For example, collaboration between teachers and parents, and thus time for collaboration to occur, is essential to successful inclusion. An administrator can demonstrate his support for inclusion by building this time into the school schedule. It will also be beneficial to the educational programs to provide release time for teachers to attend conferences or to visit other successful inclusive programs (locally, in state, or out of state).

Roles of General and Special Education Teachers, Administrators, and Paraprofessionals

Changes in delivery of educational services to students with disabilities necessitates changes in roles of the professionals and paraprofessionals involved in the process. The general education teacher will play a vital role in determining the success of inclusion. For many teachers their new role will require a change in attitudes developed over years of operating within the segregated society of general and special education classrooms. The general education teacher will need to develop a sense of ownership of the student with disabilities. Part of this ownership will result from being an active participant in all planning with regards to the transition to an inclusive program. This participation must include helping to develop the IEP. This initial planning meeting is the time for concerns to be voiced and potential solutions to be provided to the team's satisfaction. The general education teacher must have an opportunity to work with any therapists or other special service providers to learn correct procedures to meet the needs of the students through general education activities. The general education teacher also assumes the role of a facilitator in establishing positive communication and interactions between students with and without disabilities.

The goal of inclusion is not to eliminate special education teachers, but rather to redefine their roles. The role of the special education teacher should change from that of the key provider of services to students with disabilities to one of facilitator and resource provider. Special education teachers should provide suggestions and materials to enable the general education teachers to meet the goals and objectives of the IEP. The special and general education teachers should work hand-in-hand to plan activities to address the needs as defined in the IEP process. A collaborative role will replace the role of the special education teacher as the sole teacher of students with disabilities.

The building administrator also has specific roles related to the successful inclusion of students with disabilities. First and foremost the administrator must display a positive attitude and commitment to inclusion (Evans et al., 1992; Rude & Anderson, 1992). Rude and Anderson (1992) suggest additional activities for the building administrator: (a) cultivate of an attitude that **all** students belong in the school, (b) provide support for redefining the roles of special and general education teachers, (c) make time for team collaboration and ongoing planning, (d) hire teachers who support inclusion of students with disabilities, (e) provide training for school staff, (f) formulate a school-wide inclusion task force that develops guidelines and procedures for school-wide inclusion of students with disabilities, (g) promote on open-door policy for sharing fears and concerns, (h) provide support to teachers through the provision of release time for conferences, classroom visits, etc., and (i) promote community involvement by encouraging positive parent attitudes toward inclusion.

Paraprofessional roles also change. Frequently, paraprofessionals are instrumental in assisting in the provision of educational services to students with disabilities. However, it is important to remember that appropriately licensed teachers are ultimately responsible for the education of students, not paraprofessionals. Thus, it is imperative that a paraprofessional is not placed in charge of educational services. Rather, this individual assists the general and special education teachers. If a paraprofessional is hired to facilitate the successful inclusion of a student with disabilities, it is important that this individual is <u>not</u> viewed as the personal aide of the student. Rather, the paraprofessional should be viewed as an assistant to the entire class and should receive instructions from the classroom teacher. Viewing a paraprofessional as a personal assistant can actually be detrimental to the student. For example, the student can become excessively dependent upon that person's assistance; the assistant can interfere with interactions and development of friendships with peers; and the assistant can segregate or isolate the student within the general education classroom.

Key to the success of these role changes will be an open-minded approach by all involved staff. Flexibility is a required precursor to the successful implementation of an inclusive program. A building administrator who is also flexible in attitude and is capable of helping to orchestrate these changes is important to successful inclusion of students with disabilities.

<u>Training Needs of All School Staff</u>

All staff, both certified and paraprofessional, need to understand the changes being made. They need to know why the changes are being made, and what their respective roles are in the new program. If a different bus driver will be providing transportation, he/she must be aware of the needs of the students being transported. If a behavioral modification program is being implemented at school for a student who has an emotional/behavioral disability, the driver must be brought into the loop to see that there is consistency in responding to problem behaviors. If there are special medical, or toileting issues involved, the custodian may need to be made aware of the extra duties that may result (e.g., special cleaning procedures for bodily fluids). This new knowledge requirement also holds true for teachers and paraprofessionals. Inservice must be provided to ensure that all involved parties are aware of the program changes.

Not only must all staff be trained regarding day-to-day practices such as those discussed above, they must all be provided with training that addresses current effective practices and how to implement these practices. For example, teachers may need to be taught how to use the matrix that was

previously described. It is also likely that staff will need in-service training regarding collaboration, curriculum modifications, making appropriate and meaningful adaptations, as well as other topics.

The administrator must be involved as the plans for inservice training are developed by the teachers. All planning and subsequent implementation must be a joint effort of special and general education staff and the administrator. It is inappropriate for inservice training to be planned and provided without administrator involvement and presence. Involvement in the planning and attendance at the training will show administrative support for the training.

Parent/Caregiver Involvement

For the parents/caregivers of students with disabilities, this involvement begins with the IEP. Special education staff and the building administration must work together to show the benefits of inclusion to these parents/caregivers. It may be beneficial to summarize empirically validated benefits. It will be critical for the school staff to be able to demonstrate how the goals and objectives defined in the IEP will be met through the inclusion in the general education classroom. The matrix previously discussed can be a crucial means of showing parents/caregivers how objectives will be targeted in ongoing classroom routines. As required by the IEP process, the parents/caregivers will be able to express concerns and offer suggestions on how to make the educational program beneficial and successful.
Parent/caregiver involvement, however, does not end at the conclusion of the IEP meeting. Parents/caregivers should continue to be involved throughout implementation of the inclusive educational placement.

The parents/caregivers of students without disabilities will need to be shown how the inclusion process will work in the general education classroom to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities. However, in sharing any information it is essential that student confidentiality be protected and, thus, general information is most likely to be provided. They will also need to be given assurances that the inclusion of students with disabilities will not have a negative impact on the learning environment for their children. Once again, it would likely be advantageous to share empirically validated benefits with these parents or caregivers. They will also need to be included early in the planning process to eliminate their fears. Again, involvement should continue throughout implementation of inclusive education.

The special education staff and building administrator must involve parents from all segments of the student population in planning and implementation to provide a positive and supportive environment for change. Public forums, such as Parent Teacher Association/Organization meetings, presentations at local service and community organizations, information letters, school newsletters, and articles in local newspapers will help to educate the general public about the benefits to be gained by all students from the implementation of inclusive education. Without the development of an informed and educated population to offer support for such a service delivery change, unnecessary misunderstandings can result.

Potential Costs and Funding Sources

One of the first questions to be asked by the administrator may be, "What is it going to cost?" The second question will be, "Where will I get the money?"

When starting to plan for the move to inclusion, it is important for the special education staff to identify potential costs to the school and to the district. It will be imperative for these costs to be identified before the program is begun. The building administrator is responsible for the finite resources budgeted to his/her school, and surprises that exceed the moneys available will not promote administrative trust or support.

Part of the costs may be in the form of building or classroom modifications. Adaptive equipment may also require additional expenditures. Central administrative staff may need to be included in this planning process to approve any unusual expenses. Advanced planning and open dialogue is critical to the success of this phase in the planning process.

As these expenses are identified, it is important to identify potential sources of revenue to cover the identified needs. Various organizations and grants may be resources for some of these needs. Local or state universities or colleges may have programs available that can possibly provide some of the training needs for minimal or no cost (e.g., state or federal grants). The state department of education may have programs capable of providing assessment and assistance in various forms.

The education staff can be helpful to their building administrator by being resourceful and exploring avenues of revenue as the needs are identified. Taking a list of resources to the administrator at the same time the needs are presented will go a long way towards ensuring success of the implementation process.

Resource Personnel

Once again the universities and colleges, state department, and specialized agencies may be a prime resource for needed training, support materials, and information necessary to make the transition to inclusion successful. The staff needs to show resourcefulness as they plan and implement the program change. Communication established early in the process will yield dividends as the program is implemented.

Summary

The key to the success of any inclusionary program is open and honest communication between all parties involved. All information, both positive and negative, as well as problems and possible solutions must be presented and discussed. The building administrator can help to guarantee success, but he/she can also, perhaps unwittingly, be a hindrance in the process. Keep the building administrator involved and informed from the beginning, and the change to inclusive educational programs has a much higher chance of success. If the administrator is surprised by an unhappy parent or caregiver who charges into the office to demand the special education students be put back into their own classroom and no administration involvement has taken place prior to inclusion, things will likely go from bad to worse very quickly.

Inclusion can be a very successful and beneficial program, but only if everyone works together to make it the program of choice.

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